Igor Lykov *for Pravda Severa of April 14, 1993*

INCIDENTS IN THE NORTHERN SKY
It Turns Out We Shot Down South Korean Boeings
And Cessnas Flew in Our Sky Unpunished

For a long time information on international incidents with participation of aviation, missile corps, and radio units of the 10th Separate Air Defence Army was either classified or distorted by official propaganda. The result was that the public was totally unaware of the events which were taking place nearby. And even the military still live in the atmosphere of rumors and gossip which always fill in any information gaps.

However, there are still many things to tell about. The history of the 10th Air Defence Army has a strong resemblance, in a smaller scale only, to the history of the whole Air Defence Troops. They had everything in the north of Russia, including their own incidents with a South Korean Boeing and a Cessna plane.

On July 12, 1960, a press conference for Soviet and foreign journalists was held in the Kremlin General Secretary of the CPSU Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev in person spoke at the press conference and announced in the manner characteristic of him that a US aircraft had violated the Soviet border over the Barents Sea not far from the Kola Peninsula The intrusion was cut short in the very beginning, and that's why the Soviet Government limited itself to the elimination of the air target only

Khrushchev was, mildly speaking, exaggerating things The decision on the fate of the above strategic reconnaissance aircraft was made not in the Kremlin The Governments, parliaments, presidents, and general secretaries were attached to the incident only at the stage of a "postgame analysis" The decision on the fate of the intruder aircraft was made, however paradoxical it was, by a common pilot of the 941th Fighter Regiment of the 10th Air Defence Army Captain Vassily Polyakov However, let's proceed in order Leonid Alexandrovich Gomzyakov, the former Secretary of the Military Council of the 10th Army, who currently lives in Archangelsk, told

"On that day I flew to Severomorsk together with Army Commander General Lieutenant of Aviation Petrukhin Approximately at 1 p m we received a call from the command center The duty officer for operations reported that from Norway an air target was moving in our direction at the altitude of 9,000 meters with the speed of 800-900 km/h The commander ordered to get a duty aircraft into the air, approach the intruder, and take down its number The commander of the Severomorsk Air Defence Formation tried to talk him out "It is prohibited to approach a target on the order and take down its number " The army commander was enraged "Eisenhower flies! Are we supposed to sit and watch him flying? Let the pilot take down his number!"

Then happened something that was unexpected for all of us The target kept moving in the direction of the Kola Peninsula Our MIG-19 fighter piloted by Captain Polyakov approached the intruder Somewhere over the state border, the aircraft merged into one flashing point on the radar screen

The tape with a recording of air-to-ground conversations between the command center and the fighter contained only several orders In particular, the voice of Polyakov could be heard "I see the target! What should I do? Tell me, what should I do?" Then there was a pause "It's on fire on fire falling down " Then communication was interrupted The fighter was far from the airdrome, and there was no repeater The army commander was reported that the target had gone in the direction of Novaya Zemlya, and our fighter most probably had been shot down and had fallen into the sea

We left for the command center immediately As soon as we came there, the duty officer announced that the MIG-19 had landed on its airfield and its pilot had reported that the US bomber had violated the 12-mile zone of Soviet territorial waters and had been eliminated "

When the pilot was brought to the general, he heard the following "Polyakov? You'll be court-martialled! Why did shoot without being ordered?"

Meanwhile our radar operators, after having lost sight of the intruder aircraft (it was not a bomber but a reconnaissance version of the B-47 "Stratojet" bomber called RB-47), continued to "track" it on the table The course was in the direction of Novaya Zemlya There they gave up "tracking" the plane which had been shot down by that time, after having learned that the MIG-19 had already done away with the intruder Either the NATO's electronic reconnaissance means were effecting radio interception, or they learned about the course of the their lost aircraft from some other sources, but Americans began searching for it the area of Novaya Zemlya somewhat to the north of the archipelago They even asked for the assistance of the Soviet side

It is really a case of laughter through tears since we even provided vessels for searching in that area However, Northern Fleet ships were conducting the real search at the place where the RB-47 was actually shot down Four members of the crew of the spy plane were killed, two pilots parachuted and were picked up by a Soviet trawler

The reaction of our top commanders was, to put it mildly Nobody knew about the political assessment of the incident, everybody was scared There were obviously stupid orders such as "to salvage the aircraft" or "to pull the kerosene spill to our side" At the moment of the attack (Polyakov conducted the ideal approach to the target and shot 111 30-millimeter shells at it), the RB-47 was going at the speed of 700 km/h Falling from the altitude of nine kilometers, the aircraft gained huge speed and broke to pieces after hitting against the water There was nothing to salvage In addition, the Northern Fleet did not have respective equipment for deep-water operations

As for the spill The kerosene from the tanks of the RB-47 formed a thin pellicle on the sea surface Unfortunately, the spill was located beyond our territorial waters However, if the parameters of a target and an attacking aircraft are not known, this factor does not prove much A plane may be shot down over one's own territory but may fall in neutral waters or be shot down over neutral waters and fall in one's territorial waters

In the end, the fact that the kerosene spill was located beyond our territory testified against us But the decision to "pull it to our side" was a sheer stupidity The person who gave this order did not realize what he was saying However, no one even tried to follow the orders

The whole farce was stopped by Khrushchev He asked where the aircraft had been shot down Then he was shown the place on a map After this, the pilot who was already assigned to Moscow and who was getting prepared for being put into prison was awarded with the Red Banner Order Second pilot Olmsted and navigator MacCown, as well as the body of the commander of the RB-47 Captain Palm, who parachuted but died of exposure to cold after finding himself in the water, were handed over to Americans And Nikita Khrushchev joyfully lectured foreign journalists trying to pin the head of the Soviet state down after the incident, telling them that it was not important where spies had fallen and the main thing was that they should not fly near our borders

This was an example of sheer injustice the masters were fighting but the servants were suffering from that fight The Governments and socio-political systems were in conflict, as well as some individuals who happened to be at the political Olympus at that time However, wives and kids of pilots, both Russian and American, became widows and orphans as a result of that fight All of these pilots were patriots in their understanding

Mentioning Russian pilots among the victims of that fight is not a slip of the tongue Russians were also killed In the 50s, US Air Force aircraft did whatever they wanted in the Soviet sky, flying over Minsk, Kiev, and Leningrad and appearing over Moscow suburbs The date of April 29, 1954, became the peak of contempt for the sovereignty of the Soviet Union's airspace On that day, several dozens of US B-47 bombers formed up over the Novgorod-Smolensk-Kiev line This action represented a massive nuclear strike exercise The Russian Air Defense did not have missiles able to reach US aircraft, and Russian fighters lacked ceiling for attacking Stratojets Russian pilots, after gaining speed, performed a steep climb, tried to catch the bodies of US spy aircraft adapted from strategic bombers in their sights, and then fell down, losing altitude

Some intruders were shot down but we often lost our fighters and our pilots

1960 became the year of revenge for the Soviets On May 1, a missile "found" the U-2 piloted by Francis Harry Powers in the Sky over Sverdlovsk By the way, if Powers had not been shot down over the Ural, he would have had to fly in

the area controlled by the 10th Army at the next stage of his mission The terminal point of his flight was the Bodo Air Base in Norway The Air Defence units of the 10th Army had been already placed in operational readiness

On June 1, the RB-47 was shot down No one will ever know if it actually violated the Soviet border or only was going to cross it However, US reconnaissance aviation stopped flying over the USSR after 1960

A more complicated story, which was mysterious in its way, happened 15 years ago, on April 20, 1978

Boris Alexandrovich Samoilov, a retired colonel now and the duty officer for operations on that day, recollected the following

"At 9 p m on that day I came on duty Six or seven minutes later, the duty officer from the command and control center at Severomorsk reported that an unidentified aircraft was detected 300 kilometers from the border Duty services were placed in operational readiness

I gave the order to clarify the situation Several possible versions were considered Could it be our AN-12? No confirmation Was it a TU-95 bomber belonging to the Northern Fleet Aviation? However, the Navy did not have any aircraft approaching, all their aircraft were over the ocean at that time

The situation was becoming more and more tense A SU-15 interceptor was taken to the air The pilot reported that it was a four-engine aircraft bearing Chinese identification signs I was demanding information if it was a passenger aircraft or not There was no reply

At 9 19 p m , the aircraft crossed the border and was heading for the inner part of the Kola Peninsula

The target was followed by at least three duty crews of three fighter regiments The interceptors tried to force the intruder to begin landing, but the latter paid no attention to their orders The SU-15 piloted by Anatoly Kerefov made several turns right in front of the intruder's nose The intruder aircraft performed a turn and began moving in the direction of Finland At 9 42 p m , a heat-homing missile was launched and hit the outer left engine of the intruder aircraft After that, the intruder began losing altitude and speed and was looking for a landing site "

An incident which could have been really fatal for the intruder airplane happened in the air The missile damaged the engine and broke off the outer wing panel which was registered on Soviet radar screens and had the parameters of a US cruise missile which was tested at 1978 This fact caused a disarray at the command and control center of the aviation regiment

You can imagine the units were alerted at night, and after the foreign intruder aircraft was damaged, a target with the parameters of a missile was separating from it The piece which was broken off was hit with a missile launched from a fighter at the altitude of 6,000-7,000 meters All crews taken to the air heard the conversation Captain A Bosov and later Senior Lieutenant S Slobodchikov reported that missiles had been launched Everybody understood that something really serious was going on and it was not a drill at all Fortunately, the duty officers for operations had strong nerves, and the first target was not torn to pieces by Soviet missiles after the second one had been eliminated

The intruder was forced down and landed on the ice of the Korpiyarvi Lake in Karelia In general, the aircraft was wandering in the Soviet airspace for one hour and forty-six minutes

The intruder turned out to be a Boeing 707 which belonged to the Korean Airlines Its commander Kim Chang Kyu, who should be rendered his due, literally managed to take 110 passengers out of the grave There is no exaggeration since he managed to land the damaged aircraft onto the unprepared site located in the forest at night The commander's experience may have played its role, Commander Kyu was a former South Korean Air Force ace who had fought against our MIGs However, there still were casualties one Korean was killed and several were wounded by the fragments of the Russian missile

This incident became the reason of numerous questions which seem to be quite logical Why did the crew deviate by more than 1,000 kilometers from their route? Why did not they respond to radio messages? Why did not the US radio technical posts which saw the passenger plane deviating from its route (the Korean aircraft was actually flying in the opposite direction) and entering other country's airspace take any measures?

If the deviation was accidental, why did not the crew switch on their distress signal and switch to the international emergency frequency? Why did not the Korean liner obey the orders of the red-star MIGs and SUs? And at last why did the "stranded" liner begin moving in the direction of Finland suddenly and precisely?

Everything testifies to the fact that there was a wolf in sheep's clothing What was the reason of sending the liner, which was totally unprepared for reconnaissance operations, to other country's airspace? A foreign body triggers into operation the whole air defence system So one can just sit and write down the combat frequencies of radar stations, order of combat preparation, and system of interaction of regiments and battalions both within divisions and brigades and with neighboring formations And what about passengers? In such cases they play the role of rabbits sacrificed to a boa constrictor in the person of the Air Defense

That's a pity that the incident was hushed up Who knows, if the truth had been established then, there could have been no tragedy over Sakhalin on September 1, 1983, when another SU-15 shot down another Boeing However, in the Far East the liner was shot down in earnest, being hit with two missiles at once On a SU-15, the missile located under the right wing is a heat-homing one This means that it hits a source of heat Losing one engine for a huge Boeing 747, if not added by the destruction of the wing, is not lethal. However, being hit with the left missile means death Due to a radar guiding system, the missile may hit any place, i e the body or spar, or may explode somewhere near the cockpit 269 people were killed in the Boeing 747 Nothing can be changed now, of course, but still if the experience of the incident of the 10th Army with the Boeing 707 had been taken into account--

At 7 13 p m of July 25, 1976, a light aircraft moving from Finland violated the Soviet border The intruder flew over the green caps of Soviet border guards at the height of 100 meters, heading for the central part of the Kola Peninsula

Duty interceptors taken to the air failed to detect the target which was only from time to time seen on the radars After a short time, the air defence services lost the intruder plane completely

However, the two Finns who piloted the Cessna were neither lunatics nor suicides nor even CIA agents They just had too much beer and got lost

When the guys were out of fuel, the fortune smiled at them and they saw an airfield right in front of them They landed for four minutes there, refuelled their Cessna from their own gas cans, and took off in haste after seeing soldiers running toward them The Finns told later that they took the soldiers dressed in unknown uniforms for Norwegian policemen who could fine them for a considerable sum, deprive them of their pilot's licenses, or even confiscate their Cessna

That was not Norway however The Finnish Cessna was refuelled at our alternate airfield Alakkurti which belonged to the Air Defense

On the total, the Finns had flown about 350 in our sky They were moving in the direction of Archangelsk

When they were out of fuel again, the Finns had nothing to do but to try their luck once more, but the landing on the shore of a forest lake south-east of Kandalaksha was unsuccessful The Cessna nosed over The crew was safe and sound however Some time later, the uninvited guests met Russian foresters by pure chance Otherwise only their skeletons and the remains of their plane could be discovered in the third millennium, since the area is really uninhabited The Finns, who got sober by that time, were returned to Finland Their plane was also returned The plane was a Cessna 150 Aerobat, whose weight without fuel and a crew amounts to 440 kilos V Golovin was a person who transported the body and wings of the Cessna, which had been taken apart, and handed them over to a representative of Finnish border authorities

Hard times of "postgame discussions" came for the personnel of the 10th Army Now late Marshal Yevgeny Yakovlevich Savitsky, a legendary character who flew till the age of 64, spending about 13,000 hours in the air, came personally and like a hurricane swept over the headquarters and airfields, dismissing people from their posts, reprimanding them, and accusing of service inaptitude

Why does the Air Defence, as a rule, successfully counteract powerful, high-speed, and fantastically equipped reconnaissance aircraft, which really represent the electronic wonder of the 20th century, and why is it so helpless when dealing with toy Cessna planes?

It is always easy to find specific scapegoats in such cases, i e pilots, radar operators, commanders, and duty officers for operations who "did not take necessary measures", "committed a violation", or "neglected their duties" They were reprimanded, notified on their "service inaptitude", transferred to lower positions, dismissed, or even put behind bars sometimes However, Cessnas still do whatever they want And not only here They have the same situation in France and the USA

The difference is that in these countries such tricks of air cowboys riding light sports aircraft are treated with a good deal of philosophic calmness Private aviation, as well as the infrastructure of respective airfields, has been developed considerably there However, not every aircraft may be intercepted all the same Such a state of things is added by the peculiarity of national legislation which reads that the pilots of US Air Force and Navy fighters do have the right to open fire at private aircraft, though the whole squadrons of sports Cessnas and Beachcrafts keep carrying drugs from Latin American countries US fighter pilots have the right to force down intruder aircraft carrying drugs so that police could arrest their pilots and freight

This is how such things stand in the West As far as this country is concerned, there has always been a myth on our "locked borders", and everybody believed in this legend Actually, our air defense system has been developed for repelling massive air raids of NATO bombers and missile carrier aircraft, whereas Cessna planes are incapable of carrying even one more or less serious bomb

A stunning article was published in Krasnaya Zvezda three or four years ago The article told that if we wanted to provide one-hundred-percent impenetrability of our borders, we had to built such and such number of additional radar stations and conscript to the Air Defense troops several dozens of thousands people more, which would cost us additional billions of rubles (in the prices of that time) If we are that rich to afford it, let's tighten our belts If not, let's put up with the thought that our Air Defense can repel massive air raids and provide the safety and protection of our important facilities from really dangerous aircraft As for the cases of breakthrough of individual helicopters and difficult-to-detect light planes, there will never be any guaranties

The military journalists were too late to begin the campaign, since it is very difficult to get rid of stereotypes They should have done that before At the time when the Finnish Cessna 150 was refuelled at the air defense airfield, or when Mathias Rust landed his Cessna 172 on the Red Square However, those emergencies were mostly explained by the blunders on the part of the "scapegoats" Such a situation provided excellent opportunities for professional scouts

On May 28 and 29, 1988, exactly a year after the breakthrough of Mathias Rust, his air school instructor Andreas Ohmer, who piloted a similar Cessna, twice broke through into our territory from the airport of Kirkenes, Norway The teacher was allegedly celebrating the anniversary of his infamous pupil's pertinent flight in such a way

After crossing the border and conducting two fly-arounds over the town of Nikel, which represents a restricted access area, the German kept returning to his base, as if he was alarmed by something

Later our state security bodies managed to get confidential information that the action had been thoroughly planned Soviet radio interception services established that new powerful transmitters had been installed on the Norwegian side They must have been used for maintaining steady communication with the pilot The fact that the transmitters were capable of receiving information at a rather big distance from them testified that the pilot was not going to limit himself with a reconnaissance fly-around of the Soviet peninsula

Despite the fact that the intruder flew at low altitude, trying to hide himself in the canyon, the radar operators managed to detect the target and inform the command and control center of its coordinates

Having been taught a lesson by Mathias Rust and having got it in the neck, the air defence units acted resolutely and bravely this time Several MIGs were taken to the air for intercepting the intruder, and missile battalions were placed in operational readiness However, the information on the serious countermeasures of air defence services must have been transmitted to Andreas Ohmer as well, and he was wise enough to take to his heels, since he had a rather well-grounded apprehension of being shot down Big brass with large stars on their shoulders came to the place of the incident from former Leningrad After having flown by the route of the intruder in a helicopter, the commission came to the conclusion that the air defense services had done the excellent job that time There were some reprimands concerning the interaction between the border guard troops and other units located in the border area After pointing out the drawbacks and establishing a time frame for their elimination, the generals returned to Leningrad, and the local population switched on their TV sets, believing that Western reporters would provide them with complete, fresh, and unbiased information (foreign TV channels can be rather steadily received there)

That night they could watch the interview with the intruder himself, who without a shadow of embarrassment complained that his mission had been ruined by the Russian military

The German pilot's plans were really impressive The map with the route of his flight was shown in detail on the TV The terminal point of the flight was, you may believe or not, the Winter Palace Square in Leningrad, which is the very center of the "cradle of three revolutions"

Thus the provocation represented not only a reconnaissance mission but an obvious political action That was the time of perestroika, and the Soviet General Secretary kept persuading the world of the new way of thinking of the Soviet people from every rostrum If the border incident had finished by some bloodshed, it could have taken another one hundred years to make the world believe in our peaceful intentions On the contrary, if the Cessna had landed in Leningrad, this would have been a tremendous detriment to the prestige of the Soviet military forces The "postgame discussions", which would have inevitably followed such a disgrace, would have been more detrimental for the army than a neutron bomb explosion

The reaction of the official Soviet propaganda was not unexpected, and everything was in its best traditions In other words, the official mass media pretended that nothing had happened The future President of the USSR, as usual, stated that "had not been informed" The incident became a lesson only for the Air Defence For several years after the incident, Air Defence pilots, radar operators, and missileers became especially vigilant in the twenties of May Danger foreseen is half avoided What if the enemy decides to mark the anniversary of Rust's adventures by flying to, say, the capital of the White Sea Area?

This story throws light on a part of the events only Unfortunately, this story has its dark side hidden behind the seven seals of idiotic censorship However, the concealed truth will sooner or later become known for the public, and we will learn something which we should have known long ago, should have been proud of long ago, or should have grieved over long ago

Better late than never And it's even better, if in proper time